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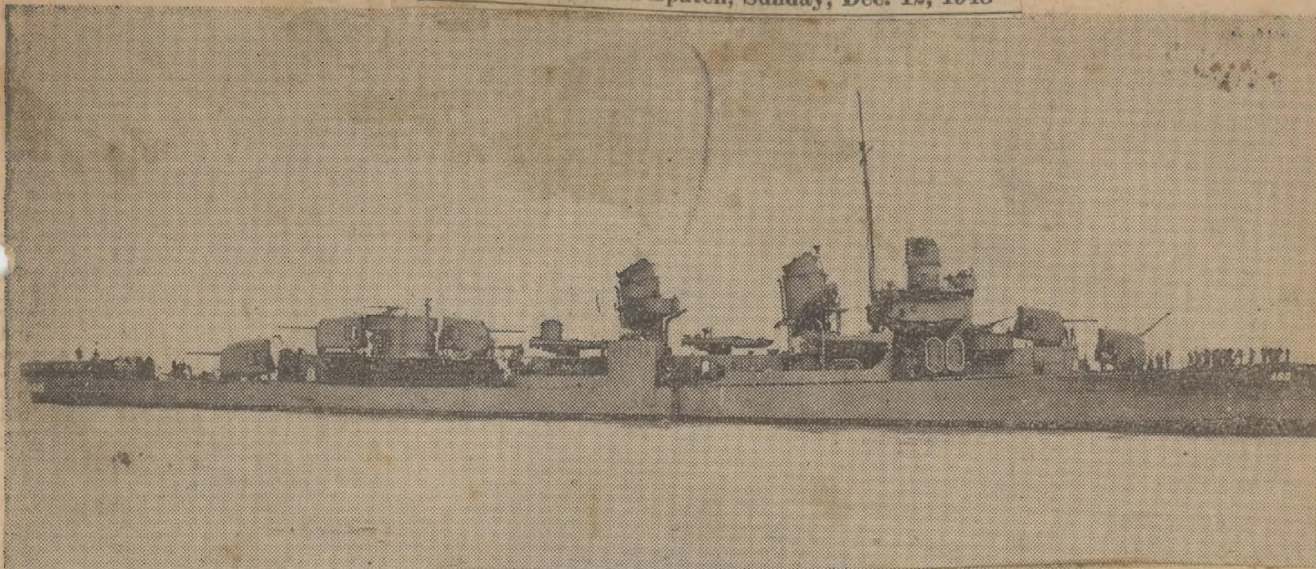
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The destroyer O'Bannon, named for a Virginia-born hero of the war with Tripoli, saw heavy duty in World War II.

Destroyer O'Bannon Had Full Career

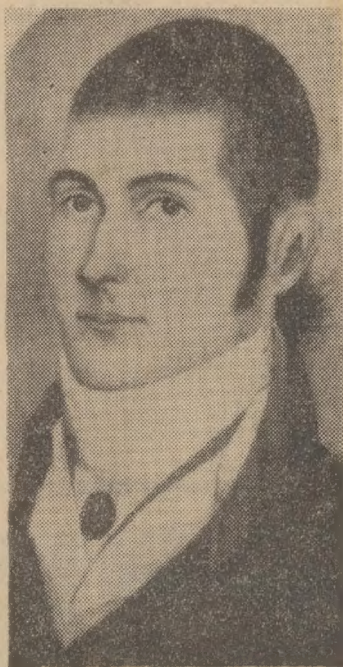
By Hiram M. Smith, Jr.

It is the policy of the Navy to name destroyers for persons of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps who have rendered service to their country. In accordance with this policy, the 2,050-ton Fletcher-class destroyer O'Bannon was named for Lieutenant Presley Neville O'Bannon, who was born in Fauquier County in 1784.

The man who gave his name to this ship—which had as gallant and as colorful a career as any serving in the Pacific—was an officer in the newly formed Marine Corps. He served during the war with Tripoli, in the early part of the last century.

O'Bannon was aboard the frigate Adams in 1802 and 1803, and for the next three years was attached to the frigate President and the brig Argus. While aboard the Argus, O'Bannon led a small landing party to storm enemy works at Derne, in North Africa. This detachment left Alexandria, Egypt, and marched 600 miles to come before these works on April 26, 1805. Next day, gunfire from our ships Hornet, Argus and Nautilus supported the assault and O'Bannon's force stormed them successfully that afternoon. The Tripolitan flag came down and, for the first time in history, the Stars and Stripes flew over an old-world fortress.

O'Bannon retired from the service March 6, 1807, and his remains now lie in Frankfort, Ky.



Lt. Presley N. O'Bannon

Destroyer's Career

Christened by a great-great-grandniece of O'Bannon, June 26 of the same year, the destroyer named for him slid down the ways at Bath, Maine, in February, 1942. Mounting nine five-inch guns, eight torpedo tubes, and an array of 20- and 40-millimeter antiaircraft guns, cruising at 35 knots, and carrying a complement of more than 325 officers and men, her commissioning pennant was run up under Lieutenant-Commander Edwin R. Wilkinson.

At this time three-fourths of her enlisted complement and several of her officers had seen no sea duty. The Japanese had just been checked at Midway, their first decisive defeat in 350 years, but we had suffered losses also and their next move was a matter of anxious conjecture. All fleet units were urgently needed and O'Bannon was to acquire her combat experience quickly.

The ship proceeded to the Solomon Islands area, after fitting out and shakedown, to engage in convoying, patrolling and shelling shore installations. American ships were then attempting to intercept and destroy the force of enemy ships known as the "Tokyo Express," which was making almost nightly runs through "The Slot," a stretch of island-bound water through the center of the Solomon group. The purpose of the Japs was to reinforce and supply positions on Guadalcanal, to threaten our weak footholds, and to attack or tie up our naval units.

During the fall of 1942 enemy attempts to reinforce their garrisons other than by "the Express" were consistently thwarted by our PT boats, interception of barges, which they attempted to run in under cover of darkness. The Japanese then assembled a large task force at Rabaul, New Britain, to prepare for and support a major landing.

When this force was spotted by scout planes en route to the Solomons, the O'Bannon was a unit of the task group which moved to meet it in what was to be known as the battle of Guadalcanal.

The enemy was brought to action the night of November 12-13 off Lunga Point. Steaming into the middle of the enemy formation and taking it by surprise, our ships opened fire. The O'Bannon promptly shot out the searchlights of the 30,000-ton Japanese battleship Hiyei and later found her with a spread of torpedoes, which left her a sitting duck for planes next day. She was also credited with hits on other units which our aircraft and surface reinforcements destroyed with the Hiyei.

Furious Sea Fight

In what has been termed one of the most furious sea fights of history, and against long odds, our forces inflicted heavy damage on the enemy. Our positions in the area were more secure than they had ever been.

The defenders paid a tragic price, however. The light cruiser Atlanta went down, as did the destroyers Barton, Laffey, Monsen and Cushing. Then, as the action was being broken off, the light cruiser Juneau was torpedoed and blew up, carrying the five Sullivan brothers and many others to their deaths.

The heavy cruiser San Francisco suffered severe damage, while an underwater explosion

and an eight-inch shell fragment hit the O'Bannon. The destroyer Fletcher was the only one of 13 American ships to escape unscathed.

The Japanese then began to build up their garrisons in the Solomons where they were a constant threat to marine and Army land positions. On Jan. 5, 1943, the O'Bannon participated in the bombardment of the Japanese airfield area on New Georgia Island, and on the night of January 24-25 shelled an airbase under construction at Vila, where she shot down two planes.

After taking part in surface strikes, which caused damage to enemy shipping and acting as part of her screen when the heavy cruiser Chicago was sunk off Rennell Island, the O'Bannon returned to shell the Vila-Stanmore area on March 5.

A Rescue Mission

While escorting a convoy from Guadalcanal on June 22, the O'Bannon was subjected to a determined air attack which resulted in the sinking of our cargo ships Aludra and Deimos. The O'Bannon, unhit, stood by and rescued survivors. Attacked again while convoying off Lunga Point, she assisted in breaking up the formation of planes without loss and crew members observed five aircraft in flames.

In a bombardment of positions on New Georgia the ship stood into shore under fierce coastal fire to rescue survivors of the sinking destroyer, Strong on July 5. Later that day, en route to Espiritu Santos, the task group was ordered to turn and engage "The Express." The ensuing fight cost the Japanese two destroyers, but the United States lost the veteran light cruiser, Helena. During the action the Helena's survivors were widely scattered, and many went ashore on the Japanese-held island of Vella Lavella. On July 26 the O'Bannon was one of a force covering operations in which 175 officers and men were rescued. As a result of these exploits, the O'Bannon was affectionately christened "Little Helena," in recognition of her courageous aid to the stricken cruiser.

The O'Bannon again ran into "The Express" the night of July 12-13 and, with her task group, inflicted such damage that American landings on New Georgia were not threatened and the Japanese could no longer use the Kula Gulf route to supply garrisons at Vila and Munda.

The fire of O'Bannon opened this fight, and her torpedoes were credited with substantially aiding the sinking of the light cruiser Jentsu.

At Vella Gulf

North of Vella Gulf the night of August 17-18, the O'Bannon, with three other destroyers, en-

countered four enemy destroyers escorting a number of troop-laden barges to augment their forces on Vella LaVella, where our latest landings had just taken place. Pressing home their attack on the escort vessels, in spite of hostile air coverage, the American destroyers thoroughly mauled the Nipponese and sent them scuttling for safety. Returning to the barges, they then disposed of them with machine guns.

The O'Bannon's next action was soon to come. The night of October 6, with the destroyers Chevalier and Selfridge, she met and turned back a force of 10 destroyers attempting to evacuate troops from Vella LaVella. Her torpedoes alone blew up the new and large destroyer Yugumo, while at least two others were seriously damaged.

During the fight, the Chevalier, out of control and sinking from a torpedo hit, swung into the O'Bannon's bow and once more the O'Bannon stood by for survivors.

There followed a trip to the West Coast for overhaul, and, in December, the ship was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for "outstanding performance in combat against enemy forces in the South Pacific from Oct. 7, 1942, to Oct. 7, 1943." On three earlier occasions, the Navy Cross had been awarded the ship's commanding officer. The action of Nov. 13, 1942, off Guadalcanal, the shelling of Kula Gulf positions, the rescue of the Strong survivors, and the fight off Vella LaVella were highlighted.

To the Philippines

Battle-hardened and deadlier than ever, the O'Bannon was back to shell installations at

made largely by Anzac troops and was the first landing to deny the Japanese further fruits from their seizure of The Netherlands East Indies.

At the war's end, she was a unit of the group supplying further carrier strikes against the Northern Honshu-Southern Hokkaido area of the Japanese islands. Finally, as a fitting climax to her effective and courageous war career, the O'Bannon was present in Tokyo Bay with the Third Fleet at the formal surrender and occupation of Japan.

She is now a part of the inactive naval forces on the West Coast, to see service again in the event of another emergency.

Aitape, New Guinea, in April, 1944, to prepare for American landings and shot up Medina Plantation, on New Ireland, May 29. After a period of convoy and patrol, she returned to support the landing on Morotai Island on September 15.

Reoccupation of the Philippines began in October, with the ship playing an active role. Attacked while patrolling off Suluan Island, at the mouth of Leyte Gulf, she fought off three separate formations of planes and is credited with destroying one.

From Feb. 13 to 18, 1945, she supported landing operations on Luzon, in the Philippines, which was the objective area for landings to retake Bataan. This done, she shelled Corregidor to clear the way for parachute troops, who were followed by an infantry battalion. Once more she returned to convoy duty to protect our lines of supply, then silenced coastal batteries near Ternati, Cavite. This was ticklish work, for Jap gunners hid in caves around their emplacements and held their fire until they could lure a bombarding ship into position to receive it. Here work was made doubly difficult by floating mines.

Supporting landings on Zamboanga Peninsula, Mindanao, she again brought shore installations under fire and served as a radar picketship. Later she rendered the same service to the Cebu city area and Carabao Island.

At Jap Surrender

With other fleet units and cruisers of the Royal Australian Navy, she participated in gunfire preparation for the occupation of Tarakan Island in late April and May. This assault was

made largely by Anzac troops and was the first landing to deny the Japanese further fruits from their seizure of The Netherlands East Indies.

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